

March 16, 1961

Mr. Howard Simons  
872 National Press Building  
Washington 4, D.C.

Dear Mr. Simons,

In a brief correspondence it would be difficult to deal with the subtle issues raised by your letter of March 13, 1961. There is some truth in the most contradictory of your remarks.

Speaking for the particular problem of exobiology, I would say that NASA has made great strides in the past eighteen months towards the development of a program which is reasonably consistent with vehicle capabilities. The agency has given the most generous support to my own research program - in contrast to the remark that : "unless an experiment is directly related to 'man-in-space' it will not be supported." Of course, it remains to be seen whether biological experiments will be given adequate priority on the planetary probes when these are actually ready. There is every indication of it. There have been some serious delays and shortages of staff in government laboratories for the development of scientific instruments and their adaptation to space flight.

On the whole I would say that NASA is under great pressure to use its available funds for engineering development of new vehicles and for such popular projects as Mercury. A more balanced program would undoubtedly make more money available for background scientific research and instrumentation - not just in biology. NASA is also bound by legislative controls on the use of funds for construction, e.g., for university laboratories, and this is doubtless the main pinch you have heard about. The strong emphasis on engineering can doubtless be traced to the competition for performance where the Russians have outstripped us. I have full confidence in the program directors at NASA, who are doing a conscientious job of interpreting Congressional interest in the best interests of a sound program. As to other aspects of space biology, I am not so well acquainted with the present state of NASA operations and would prefer not to comment.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics